



Quality Review Report 2013-2014

School of America's Heroes

27Q137

**109-15 98 Street
Queens
NY 11417**

Principal: Laura Mastrogiovanni

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Lead Reviewer: Catherine M. Powis

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

School of America's Heroes is a middle school with 1979 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 7% Black, 32% Hispanic, 2% White, and 58% Asian students. The student body includes 7% English language learners and 11% special education students. Boys account for 52% of the students enrolled and girls account for 48%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 92.7%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- All stakeholders work as a unified team to create a respectful and inclusive setting that provides academic and personal supports for both students and adults. (1.4)
 - A school-wide commitment to maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes is prevalent across all aspects of this large middle school. The school is a secure place where students are engaged in learning and appreciate the superior level of support they receive for their personal and academic development, from teachers, guidance, and school leaders. Rules and codes delineate boundaries that students respect, such as dress code and a code of conduct, attendance and lateness. As a result, Online Occurrence Reporting System (OORS) data shows a drop in suspensions over last year at this time, with comparatively low numbers for the school to date. Celebrations and incentives recognize achievement and celebrate diversity, such as school-wide planning for Respect For All week in February, a Multicultural Extravaganza in the spring and an annual school musical that promote student pride, as well as both band and chorus members performing at seasonal concerts. Students, especially members of the student government, are quick to share that their voice is heard when planning these events that unify and celebrate an all inclusive environment. Dances, grade trips, crazy hat or sweater day are just a few examples of additional events requested and planned by students. Moreover, one student expressed that she likes the “opportunity to practice self-responsibility and can dig down into the curriculum and the teacher helps me when needed.” Students’ appreciation extends to the support that staff members provide in helping them to prepare high school applications, including essay writing and art portfolios as well as preparation for tests required for admission to specialized high schools. Staff is supported by on-site professional development to consistently address the socio-emotional needs of students, resulting in actions such as deans and guidance counselors hosting assemblies and engaging in conversations and activities with staff and students about effective responses to bullying. The school touts that it is a “bully-free school”. Furthermore, students articulate that they feel comfortable reaching out to a cross-section of staff for help, including teachers, deans, counselors, school leaders, and security officers. The staff is attentive to daily attendance, including period-to-period attendance, resulting in the high rate of 95.5% school-wide attendance to date. These collaborations, driven by school spirit and responsible behaviors, motivate and support students, creating a culture that celebrates a holistic approach to learning and guides school improvement efforts for students to achieve rapid academic and social emotional growth.
- Common-Core aligned curricula challenge students through rigorous academic tasks and activities that promote college and career readiness. (1.1)
 - The school has adopted English language arts Code X and math CMP3 curricula and focuses deeply on the instructional shifts across grades, with a lens on high leverage unit topics emphasized on State assessments. Recognizing the need to build rigorous habits for college and career readiness, teachers incorporate additional writing activities into the Code X unit plans. Samples of student work from a variety of sub-groups across grades exemplify text-based argumentative writing in social studies, non-fiction informational or investigative writing in science, and both in English language arts, with an emphasis on the writing process. Additionally, this year’s school-wide instructional focus, language development,

supports all students, especially English language learners and Former English language learners. Typically, Tier II and III vocabulary is frontloaded prior to readings and unit introduction and revisited and coupled with opportunities for students to practice strategies they can use when reading independently, such as utilizing context clues to help them determine the meaning of unknown words. This aligns to shift number six of the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS). The school offers students in several classes on each grade, accelerated Regents preparatory coursework in math and science, contributing to the most recent High School Readiness Indicators showing 96.8% of students who took the math exams earning a passing score, and 89.3% passing in science. Furthermore, the school is proud of its award winning arts program that not only exposes students to the arts, but also results in acceptance of many students to specialized arts schools. All teachers have access to curricula and collaboratively developed tasks, through a digital platform that engages them in curricula implementation work this year. Formative pre- and post -performance tasks are aligned to each topic in a unit and provide an assessment to determine continued support in the next unit, thereby building coherence across the year. As a result, ongoing refinement of curricula accelerates student progress toward closing the achievement gap, as evident in gains noted in performance task results from September to present, across grades.

- Effective school-wide assessment practices aligned to the curricula include the analysis of student progress and communication of feedback to students to build their awareness of next steps in improving their achievement of learning goals. (2.2)
 - The school analyzes a plethora of data streams including, but not limited to, an initial look at the multi-faceted Progress Report, the New York State English as a Second Language Achievement Test, growth reports, and lowest third rankings, to determine students' strengths and current needs. Teachers maintain data folios to track student goal achievement and school leaders utilize the data to sift out the quarterly performance and progress trends. In September, all teachers assessed students using a Reading Assessment Inventory (RAI), Math Assessment Inventory (MAI), and a school-created argumentative writing baseline that produce skills-based item analyses used to group students in classrooms for focused support. Grade-wide trend analyses identified areas of challenge, such as point of view and meaning of unfamiliar words in grade six, applying prior knowledge and predicting outcomes in grade seven, making inferences, and confirming and revising predictions in grade eight. Across all grades students struggled with identifying evidence from the text to support answers and unwrapping the question. Similar analyses for math surfaced strengths and skill deficits. For example, in grade seven student work shows growth in the number system domain and challenges in unwrapping word problems. To assess students' progress, teachers make comparisons between this baseline information and unit assessments embedded in Code X and CMP3 curricula, as well as school-created assessments in social studies and science. Then they adjust instructional practices to address students who continue to struggle with identifying multiple references to textual evidence and need to strengthen their writing skills. Furthermore, in response to assessment analyses, teachers periodically review and modify student groupings for English as a second language learners, small-group intervention services and extended day assignments, to insure that instruction accurately reflects students' learning needs. Bar graph representations of comparative data from September to present, show overall growth across grades in math and English language arts, especially for English language learners. Also, growth is evident when comparing periodic assessment data for English language learners from fall 2012 to fall 2013. For all subjects, teachers use a school-wide grading policy aligned to curricular

expectations, to provide real-time assessment results on Pupil Path, a web-based system accessible to parents as well as students. They couple extended written responses with rigorous, task-specific rubrics that are evident across classrooms, where they are used to assess students' skill proficiency as well as content knowledge. For example, teachers use rubrics for argumentative, informative/explanatory, and narrative writing, to provide focused feedback to students regarding what they do well and what needs improvement. In science, grade seven plate tectonics projects culminated in an informative and explanatory work product, with feedback and guidance provided by a task-specific plate tectonics-based rubric including content and writing skills. Another grade eight teacher provided written, comprehensive next steps to students, using an argumentative writing rubric. As a result, students are well aware of what they need to do to continue to make progress in their work.

- Pedagogical practices ensure that student learning is supported by classroom teaching strategies that foster student engagement and rigorous thinking, as evident in student work products. (1.2)
 - The school's belief about how students learn best is grounded in the Danielson Framework, with connections to the framework evident in comprehensive lessons that are crafted around essential questions embedded in unit plans. Learning objectives, teaching strategies, small group instruction highlighting specific scaffolding strategies, assessment/evidence of learning indicators, and whole group wrap-up, are evident in classrooms, resulting in teaching practices that embed Common Core expectations and exemplify instructional shifts. Lessons demonstrate arrays of strategies that emphasize the "Understanding By Design" approach to support the needs of all learners, especially English language learners and special education students. Teachers deliver targeted instruction, using Smart boards to vary modalities and provide one-to-one facilitation for individual and groups of students. Visual aids such as a model of the parts of a flower in a science, class or groups of sixth grade English language learners using a T-chart to contrast their sample of a banana and an orange in another class, serve to reinforce the school-wide instructional focus of language development. Additionally, teachers front-load vocabulary when introducing new literature so that students are able to examine text closely. Lines of questioning reflect higher-order thinking along the Depth of Knowledge continuum and push student thinking during group work. For example, in one English language arts class the teacher visited each group, asking focused questions that resulted in student demonstration of level 3 and/or 4 thinking. Similar questioning strategies ensued in another class, where students in literature circles began to develop their own questions to ponder. Furthermore, co-teaching models in special education and English as a Second Language settings, ensure a lower student-teacher ratio, allowing teachers to deliver more focused differentiated approaches matched to appropriate text complexity and student needs. As a result, student work products reflect critical thinking, with an emphasis on using evidence to support an argument, an overarching school-wide goal for all learners.

What the school needs to improve

- Strengthen professional collaborations to insure alignment of teamwork with school goals, in order to improve student progress and teacher practice across grades and subject areas. (4.2)
 - Structured professional collaboration is a high priority this year, with common planning periods scheduled for teacher team work four times each week. The

school participates in the Teacher Incentive Grant that provides professional development to accelerate movement toward highly effective teaching and strengthen teacher leadership across teams. Teachers meet in different team configurations to participate in professional development focused on the Citywide Instructional Expectations (CIE) and instructional shifts and to make adjustments to curricula to ensure alignment to CCLS. For example, during the eighth grade math team meeting an evidence-based discussion ensued regarding the strengths and challenges of students, in understanding scientific notation. Teachers agreed to address their noticing that the lack of introduction of scientific notation in grade seven, prior to January, is hampering student understanding of other science topics for their grade, and planned to craft a unit assessment with modifications for special education students. However, these practices are not consistent across teams, as during the English language arts team meeting, a leaderless team engaged in small group conversations, with no protocol for looking at student work, thus hampering the team's focus on strengths and challenges of student work brought to the meeting. Teachers adopted a list of strengths and challenges prepared by one teacher prior to the meeting, thus negating the intentions for bringing student work, and precluding a discussion of definitive next steps to address the gaps in learning. These inconsistencies among teacher teams hamper teachers' ability to identify and share potentially powerful pedagogical shifts to effect improvements for all students, thus limiting the impact of teacher teams in strengthening the instructional core and improving student performance across the school.

- Formalize systems which capture the effectiveness of curricula and instruction in supporting student progress and teacher practice, so that revisions provide opportunities for growth and continue to promote the expectations of CCLS. (5.1)
 - The school has worked diligently to embrace the newly chosen Code X and CMP 3 curricula that meet Common Core standards. As teachers “unwrap” the curricula they identify adjustments in response to learning needs, such as pacing for certain unit topics and additional emphasis on writing and language development. The school chose other curricula materials to support instruction during Academic Intervention Services (AIS), which is provided two times per week during teachers' professional periods and 37 ½ minutes in the morning, to students identified as the lowest third in achievement gap ranking in English language arts and math. Administrators closely monitor these periods for tier two interventions, focusing on attendance and parent notification, followed by adjustments to class lists as needed. However, there are no formalized systems in place to consistently monitor the effectiveness of instruction during these periods. Furthermore, student progress is not tracked specifically to monitor the impact of AIS and make adjustments in response to student learning needs. Consequently, it is not clear to what extent instruction during these professional periods and before-school time allotted to support the lowest third, is positively impacting student learning. In relation to this and in response to other instructional needs, administrators focus on capacity-building practices that are developing through the work of teacher teams, with a focus on curriculum development and instructional expectations. School leaders, coaches and professional development consultants serve as resources to facilitate the work of teams. For example, consultants attend team meetings to assist in norming team practices and support professional conversations that target effective implementation of instruction to promote student mastery of CCLS. However, formalized systems to determine the effectiveness of work at the team and classroom level are not fully developed. As a result, structures and systems to monitor the effectiveness of professional development and related teacher teamwork are emergent and therefore not yet evident across all teams.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: School of America's Heroes	UD	D	P	WD			
Overall QR Score			X				
Instructional Core							
<i>To what extent does the school regularly...</i>	UD	D	P	WD			
1.1 Ensure engaging, rigorous, and coherent curricula in all subjects, accessible for a variety of learners and aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and/or content standards?			X				
1.2 Develop teacher pedagogy from a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best that is informed by the instructional shifts and Danielson Framework for Teaching, aligned to the curricula, engaging, and meets the needs of all learners so that all students produce meaningful work products?			X				
2.2 Align assessments to curricula, use on-going assessment and grading practices, and analyze information on student learning outcomes to adjust instructional decisions at the team and classroom levels?			X				
School Culture							
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	UD	D	P	WD			
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes that supports the academic and personal growth of students and adults?				X			
3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations?			X				
Systems for Improvement							
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	UD	D	P	WD			
1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school's instructional goals and meet student learning needs, as evidenced by meaningful student work products?			X				
3.1 Establish a coherent vision of school improvement that is reflected in a short list of focused, data-based goals that are tracked for progress and are understood and supported by the entire school community?			X				
4.1 Observe teachers using the Danielson Framework for Teaching along with the analysis of learning outcomes to elevate school-wide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection?			X				
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning?		X					
5.1 Evaluate the quality of school-level decisions, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school, with particular attention to the CCLS?		X					
Quality Review Scoring Key							
UD	Underdeveloped	D	Developing	P	Proficient	WD	Well Developed